

United States Trade Representative Robert Zoellick
AGOA Forum
Closing Remarks
January 17, 2003

Thank you very much, Minister Cuttaree.

The past three days have gone by so quickly, but I feel we have been able to accomplish so much.

I will leave this country with a much fuller appreciation of the progress we have made together, but also the challenges that lie ahead.

Before reviewing the ground we have covered in these sessions, I would like to thank some of those who made this second AGOA Forum such a success -- the first Forum in Africa and an exemplary example for all of us.

I would like to thank Prime Minister Jugnauth for his leadership and his commitment to free trade and to a stronger US-sub-Saharan African trade and economic engagement. It was an honor to meet him and to see what progress he has made for his country.

We are very grateful to you, Minister Cuttaree, and to your staff at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, for the long hours that we know that you have put in over the many, many months of preparation for this extraordinary event.

And, most of all, we want to thank the people of Mauritius who have been very gracious hosts and are your best emissaries with visitors from abroad.

I want to thank all of you, the dozens of ministers and other senior-level officials from all across the continent for dedicating so much work to this session and for advancing our partnership.

And finally, I would like to thank my colleagues in the delegation from the U.S. Congress and the members of the executive branch -- Deputy Secretary of Commerce Bodman, Under Secretary of Agriculture Penn, Under Secretary of State Larson, Under Secretary of Treasury Taylor, Trade and Development Agency Director Thelma Askey, and our USAID Administrator, who I might say made a special effort to come from dealing with the problems of famine in Ethiopia and came down here because he knew it was important before going on to Ethiopia again.

And, of course, Ambassador Price and his team in a small embassy that had a lot of people come down on them in a short time and did a very, very good job.

And I would like to single out for special mention my colleague from the National Security Council, Dr. Jendayi Frazer, and her staff for the stellar job they did in the U.S. government for organizing this over a number of months. And a particular word for her colleague Bobby

Pittman who did a lot of extra effort. He even came out to my house last Sunday to help give me some of the papers in between trips. I appreciate it.

Within just two years, AGOA has proven to be a splendid success. But all of us gathering here know that we can have AGOA do even better.

This Forum has been an excellent opportunity for us to take stock of AGOA's achievements and to find ways to try to strengthen it.

And I think the importance of a stocktaking exercise is demonstrated in some of the follow-up from last year's Forum -- we have AGOA II, we have established the regional Hubs for Trade Competitiveness, we have new trade capacity programs, we have increased spending for HIV/AIDS programs, and a host of other trade, development, and financing initiatives.

This year, again, I hope we have been able to listen and to hear your concerns. We will now take these messages back, I will report to President Bush and to our colleagues elsewhere in the Administration. Because, as you saw, the President has signaled once again his commitment to AGOA, and to all of you, through his message about extending AGOA so we can build on AGOA.

At the opening I mentioned six areas that I had hoped we would be able to exchange experiences with you and to learn more about how we can strengthen and deepen our cooperation and collaboration on issues of trade and investment and development. I am very pleased to say that I think we have touched on all six of these areas.

First, we have learned more from those countries and firms that have registered successes under AGOA.

We've celebrated some of the recent successes and we have learned more about new AGOA success stories, such as new jobs and investments in Cape Verde, Senegal, Rwanda, and Uganda.

And, these success stories are not only important for the countries involved, but they can help serve as models for all of us so that we will have future success stories.

Learning from these stories is also a way that we can try to help address AGOA's challenges, particularly the challenge of maximizing and realizing tangible benefits from AGOA across all the countries in the region. And, as I have talked to many of you, I know, as you face political challenges in your own government, we need to demonstrate that these words on papers become jobs in factories and farms, and allow families to live better lives, so, together, we can build a political impulse for openness and growth in the African region.

Second, I asked how we might improve our capacity-building efforts. We received a lot of very useful input on this topic and I am glad that my colleague from USAID, Mr. Natsios, was here to hear your ideas. For example, we heard loud and clear your concerns about the perceived impact of our sanitary and phytosanitary requirements on African agricultural exports.

We will seek to address these concerns via the placement of our Department of Agriculture officials in Africa to work on the ground, not only to deal with particular SPS problems, but to try to set up programs and plans so we can move forward more African countries in meeting the U.S. food safety standards.

Third, I mentioned the importance of trying to draw on private sector knowledge, and business networks and experience.

And that is one of the unique natures of this forum. We have had parallel private sector events that provided an opportunity for exchange with businesses investors and people who have set up marketing networks. I hope that many of you had a chance to participate in some of the private sector-organized events and to tap into the wealth of experience available there. Because we in the public sector can create a framework, but it has to be the private sector, in your countries and in mine, that bring that framework to life. In particular, I learned a lot about the needs of the apparel industry, and gained some insight on how we can try to customize AGOA to fit business needs.

Fourth, we discussed specific strategies for dealing with the expiration of AGOA's third country fabric provisions.

I think we need, very quickly, to be examining with you what products and which fabrics will be most seriously affected by the expiration of those third country fabric provisions.

We will need a strong coordinated regional effort, which perhaps some of the regional organizations here can try to help us with.

We need to consider whether an extension could help current operations while maintaining the incentive to develop the textile and the fabric and the yarn industries in Africa itself so that you can create the vertically integrated operations to be more competitive with other regions in the future.

Fifth, we discussed the importance of working together in the WTO to extend and expand on trade liberalization across the globe. And, I left that discussion, and the ones I have had with individual ministers and some of the regional groups, with a much greater confidence than ever of the commonality of our interests in crucial areas such as agriculture.

And we need to do this, I think, more effectively than we have in the past. In Geneva, but also in the capitals and also with some of the regional organizations, but also your ambassadors in Washington, as I mentioned on the first day, are an excellent group of representatives for Africa, gives us an opportunity to connect them with some of the resources in Washington. So, I hope we can work on all these fronts.

We still have some work to do on the TRIPS and compulsory licensing issue. But I found the exchange useful and I hope we understand that there is a lot more common ground that I think we can develop for this topic.

Now, some uninformed people might ask why we would address HIV/AIDS at a conference largely focused on trade. But no one who has been here, and no one who has witnessed or had the opportunity to see some of the challenges in this region, dealing with a terrible epidemic, would ask that question. The presentation we had this morning was as striking as any is to show that if we can't do better on that, then our other efforts are, frankly, going to be overcome by this dangerous cloud.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic touches everything we do, and unless it is brought under control the good work we undertake here, to bring new jobs and investment to Africa, will be undermined.

But I also come away with a sense of having watched what African countries have done – Senegal, Uganda, countries elsewhere, like Thailand. I do believe that with resources, research, and African leadership, we can together develop the response to overcome this scourge.

Finally, the President announced that we would propose to Congress to extend AGOA beyond 2008. We now need, with African help, to try to get a sense of the details of how this will fit into our larger trade agenda and how it would fit into the programs you have of regional development and the WTO.

So, going forward, we will need to focus on all of the issues discussed and ways to address them, whether through AGOA, whether through the WTO, whether through NEPAD, whether through the regional organizations, or other avenues.

We will have to work together with the U.S. Congress, as well as with the private sector and the NGO community, as we did on AGOA and as we did on AGOA II, and as we will on getting AGOA extended beyond 2008.

We will need to continue to address trade as a primary issue at our discussions about African development in forums like the G8, and within the larger framework of NEPAD.

Together, we have laid a good foundation for our continued work on AGOA implementation. And, our continued work needs to broaden opportunities for trade and investment.

It's clear that together, and I emphasize together, we have made tremendous progress on AGOA implementation. But it is also clear that we have a lot more work ahead of us. Together, we can achieve our vision of a stronger trade and investment relationship -- with AGOA leading the way.

We have seen at this Forum the skill and the energy of the Mauritian Government and their private and public sectors trying to build better lives for their people. And that is one more piece of evidence of what we can accomplish.

So, in sum, I leave Mauritius knowing that AGOA provides us with an unprecedented opportunity. This week's Forum strengthens our resolve to seize it, our insights on how to do so, and our commitment to our African friends and partners.

So, I want to thank the ministers, your team, and all our African friends for coming to make one more step on what is a very important journey.

Thank you.